



September 26th, 2023

Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Northwest Region

RE: Village of Merrillan Speed Zone Reductions

Dear WisDOT NW Region:

In a letter dated June 25th, 2019 the Wisconsin Department of Transportation recommended lowering the speed limit on State Highway 95 East into the Village of Merrillan from 45 MPH to 40 MPH. This recommendation was never implemented. The Village again requests the Department reduce the speed limit on this portion of State Highway 95. The Village also requests the expansion of the reduced speed zones entering Merrillan on State Highway 95 and US Highway 12 (discussed in detail below).

The Department of Transportation 2019 letter used population and traffic data from a survey conducted in 2010. Since 2010 Merrillan has experienced a considerable amount of growth including: large increases in commercial traffic caused by the addition of area sand mine operations, the expansion of commercial nursery shipping operations in Merrillan, the increase in traffic caused by the addition of a Dollar General retail store, and the increase in tourism traffic associated with the expansion ATV/UTV tourism and area camping. This economic expansion and the associated population growth in the areas immediately surrounding Merrillan have greatly increased all traffic, including pedestrian, bicycle, and ATV/UTV traffic throughout the Village.

Also discussed in the 2019 Department of Transportation letter were curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and other aspects the Department considered in their decision/engineering/design process of the highways within the Village. The Village has little to no say in how the Department implements changes unless the Department listens to our input. There is a significant volume of pedestrian and bicycle traffic on the shoulders of Highways 95 and 12 in areas that do not currently have sidewalks and/or reduced speed limits. This activity has greatly increased since the 2010 survey and may not have been adequately considered by the department. The Village is interested in making improvements to these areas to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic and to improve public safety.

The Village of Merrilan is again requesting a reduction in the speed limit on State Highway 95 on the east side of the Village, with additional concerns on State Highway 95 on the west side, and US Highway 12 north and south, all entering the Village. We request the speed limit be reduced to 30 (preferred) or 35 MPH at an earlier location as outlined in the attached file and images. This request is based upon the following:

1. Residents have repeatedly expressed concerns about traffic speeds along these stretches of highway entering Merrilan. The existing posted speed limits, locations, and driver tendency to already exceed speed limits results in continued speeding while going further into the Village. Complaints of high speeds and dangerous vehicle passing are also prevalent in areas of the Elementary school, several driveways, pedestrian crossings, and areas with high business activity. Residents have reported difficulty in entering/exiting Highway 95 from Bunting Lane; and difficulty entering/exiting Highway 12 from the Dollar General Store, Old Highway 12, and Castle Hill Road.
2. Merrilan has taken several actions to improve traffic compliance with speed limits. In 2022 the Merrilan contracted with the county sheriff's office to supply a dedicated law enforcement officer to the village. Merrilan placed portable electronic speed signs equipped with built in radar at village entrances. Village officials have reported commercial drivers who failed to respect posted limits to their employers at multiple trucking companies. These actions and other efforts have not been successful to reduce vehicle speeds within village boundaries. It is our conclusion that expanding the speed zones at each of the village entrances by relatively small distances will have a meaningful impact on reducing speed and improved public safety.
3. There is a large amount of truck traffic in Merrilan. Between multiple sand mines, two main highways, and the location in general, a reduction in speed is important to minimizing the safety hazards associated with such large vehicles, their stopping power, and the hazardous materials they may be hauling.

State Highway 95 entering Merrilan from the East - The village requests the current 45 MPH speed limit begin approximately 700 ft further East, closest to the address (opposite side of roadway) of W10217 State Highway 95. We also request the speed limit be reduced to 30 (preferred) or 35 MPH upon reaching the Village limit just before the railroad tracks and to maintain the current 25 MPH once past the East Fork Halls Creek bridge.

(Imagery notes: Green dot is the proposed start of 45 MPH zone; red dot is the proposed start of 30-35 MPH zone.) The current posted 45 MPH location is at a curve and directly before the railroad tracks. This is abrupt and dangerous. If you drive this on a regular basis you can easily identify the hazards presented with this setup. This change affects approximately 17 homes within the Village (not including outside the Village) per the 2020 US Census Block.

State Highway 95 entering Merrilan from the West – The village requests to move the 35 MPH zone approximately 800 ft further west, near Railroad Rd. We also request the speed be reduced from 35 MPH to 30 MPH. (Imagery notes: Green dot is proposed start of 30 MPH zone, red dot is current start of 35 MPH zone (after the bridge)). Residents have expressed concerns about the speed limits abruptly changing while entering the Village from State Highway 95 west. This highway also abruptly changes to 35 MPH from 55 MPH, a 20 MPH speed reduction within a short distance. The close proximity of this speed change to the intersection of State Highway 95 & US Highway 12 likely contributes to traffic not yielding as it should. The current speed limit does not change until after the Halls Creek bridge, which is the last opportunity for a driver to adjust speed before Houghton Street. This change affects approximately 23 homes within the Village (and additional homes immediately outside the Village) per the 2020 US Census Block.

US Highway 12 entering Merrilan from the North – The village requests the 30 MPH zone at the village limits start approximately 1200 ft further to the north than the current location. (Imagery notes: Green dot is the proposed start of 30 MPH zone (village limits/Merrilan sign), red dot is the current.) There is currently an abrupt speed limit change right at a corner. Traffic regularly enters the village at a high rate of speed and that does not slow until the railroad tracks. This also applies to traffic exiting the village at a high rate of speed. In addition, the current start of the 30 MPH zone is approximately 1200 ft within village limits. This change affects approximately 10 homes within the Village (not including outside the village) per the 2020 US Census Block.

US Highway 12 entering Merrilan from the South – The village requests the 30 MPH zone start just south of Castle Hill Rd, approximately 630 ft south of the current location. (Imagery notes: Green dot is proposed start of 30 MPH zone, red dot is current). The village limit starts 312 ft before the current 30 MPH zone, leaving only about 90 ft between the village limits and Old Highway 12. This speed limit changes abruptly and is at a location with heavy cross traffic from Old Highway 12, Castle Hill Road, and a heavily patronized Dollar General business entry/exit driveway.

There is also a hill crest that creates a blind spot for cross traffic departing the Dollar General driveway in either direction. On Castle Hill Road, all Northern Family Farm shipping/receiving trucks transit from this intersection to US Highway 12. Residents have repeatedly reported dangerous situations where southbound vehicles routinely get passed while they attempt to turn left (East) from Highway 12 onto Old Highway 12. This section of road also has a large amount of pedestrian and bicycle traffic that utilize the road shoulder and there are no sidewalks or crosswalks at the intersection to accommodate them. This section of highway frequently has vehicles parked on the shoulders of the road while operators use their cell phones (because there is a cell phone dead spot at the Highway 12 bridge). This change affects approximately 42 homes within the Village at the Lower Lake area (and an additional 20 homes immediately outside the Village) per the 2020 US Census Block.

I sincerely hope the Wisconsin Department of Transportation takes all of this into consideration and takes action to address these concerns for the Village of Merrilan. On August 21, 2023, the Jackson County Board agreed with these proposals and requested their implementation by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. On July 19, 2023, the Alma Town Board was briefed on our request and had no objections.

Attached you will find the following:

- GIS map with all locations shown including the designations mentioned.
- GIS maps for each location, zoomed in for greater detail.
- Two pictures from each area of concern, one at a distance further away, one closer.
- Petition sheets from concerned citizens and other members of the public who regularly visit Merrilan.
- A copy of the Jackson County resolution supporting our request.

I am reachable at 608-487-3505 or cwruck@merrillanwi.gov.

Thank you for your time,



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